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ABSTRACT

Public relations practice in Thailand has developed from a primarily persuasive, one-way communication in the 1930s toward a two-way communication in the 1990s, with practitioners making increased use of management and research skills. Public relations education in Thailand began in 1965 at Chulalongkorn University. Currently, public relations courses are offered at undergraduate and graduate levels at 21 universities in Thailand, 11 of which offer a concentration in public relations. During the national entrance examinations in the early 1990s, prospective university students chose the communication department as their first choice among other social science programs. The most popular and competitive major is advertising, followed by public relations. Like other areas of communication, public relations curricula at Thai universities resemble those in the United States. A study of the course content of public relations programs at eight universities indicated that most of the schools had similar, if not identical, course requirements and number of hours required. All but one of the eight public relations programs examined included a professional internship, with most being mandatory. Thai is the language of instruction at all universities, except Assumption University where all classes are taught in English. Public relations courses at state universities are taught almost exclusively by full-time faculty, but private institutions employ both full- and part-time instructors. As more practitioners have received specialized training, their practice has gradually become more professional, moving from being product oriented toward being consumer and society oriented. (Contains 11 references and 2 tables of data.) (RS)

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Public Relations Education and Teaching in Thailand

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Public Relations Education and Teaching in Thailand

Introduction

Public relations practice was introduced into Thailand some 60 years ago. At present, the practice has developed from a primarily persuasive, one-way communication toward two-way communication, with practitioners making increased use of management and research skills.

The profession is now practiced widely in various types of organizations In 1993, it was reported that 1,810 governmental units, state enterprises, corporations and non-profit organizations (317 in Bangkok metropolitan and 1,493 in other 71 provinces) carried out some kinds of public relations activities (National Public Relations Committee, 1993).

Public relations courses are offered at undergraduate and graduate levels at 21 universities in Thailand. As more practitioners have received specialized training, their practice has gradually become more professional, moving from product oriented toward consumer and society oriented. Further, some administrators have started to recruit only practitioners trained in the public relations or communication discipline (Dechacheep, 1988).

This paper discusses the development of public relations education and teaching in Thailand. Programs of public relations offered at many universities as well as their curricula and faculty will be examined.

Historical Background

When Thailand changed her political system from the absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932, the new government felt it necessary to inform and educate Thai people about the new political system and the government's policies to gain their understanding and cooperation. So the military-led government founded the Publicity Office, which was upgraded in 1940 to the Publicity Department, and in 1952 was renamed to the Public Relations Department.

Public relations activities in the earlier years could be characterized as primarily press agentry/publicity (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The government attempted to inform and educate the people, mostly via broadcast media, about the democratic system, which was quite an innovative political concept for the country at that time. In addition, the government used the Public Relations Department as a propaganda mouthpiece to disseminate information about its activities. This approach involved little effort to seek feedback from the people or to encourage their participation in government-related communication.

Some labeled government efforts as deceptive to the public and destructive to the nation's political stability. Such problems appeared to stem from the lack of sincere policy, lack of planning and trained personnel, and a wide gap of information exposure between people in the rural and urban areas (Tananchaibutra, 1986).

Toward Two-Way Communication

Recognizing such shortcomings in previous administrations, Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand made a historical move in 1980

by announcing five principles to govern national public relations policy. He urged both public and private practitioners to use them as guidelines in their professional practice.

The principles highlighted the importance of the two-way communication approach, the public relations practice from the grassroots level. Also emphasized were coordination between the Public Relations Department and the Association of Public Relations Practitioners of Thailand, and the use of systematic planning and strategies based on research. Although Chamanand's administration was short-lived, his modern public relations policy served as a building block for the national public relations plan and policy officially instituted in 1988. The 24-member National Public Relations Committee was formed to set guidelines for short- and long-term public relations planning. Also the committee was to monitor, and evaluate the implemented public relations activities.

Officials of recent governments continued to recognize the importance of public relations' roles in national development. Former Minister for the Prime Minister's Office Lt. Charn Manutham once said in his speech to provincial public relations directors and broadcasting station directors that governmental public relations' major goal was to further Thai national development in many, if not all, of its social, economic, and political aspects (Tananchaibutra, 1986).

The evolution of public relations practice from one-way to two-way communication was evidenced in an analysis of public relations policy and plans in Thailand's national economic and social development plans from 1961 to 1988 (Klinpongsa, 1989). The analysis revealed that communication planning in earlier plans

was basically one-way, aiming specifically to propagate the government's provision of fundamental services and infrastructure to the public, i.e. transportation and communication systems. Not until Thailand's political ideology shifted to democratic system have communication policy and practices become more two-way oriented, giving more concerns to information exchange and cooperation between the government and the people.

Public Relations Education in Thailand

Although courses in public relations were recommended to be offered at Thammasat University in 1953, public relations education in Thailand did not begin until 1965 at Chulalongkorn University, the nation's oldest and most prestigious university (Siriyuwasak, 1983). Offered with a bachelor's degree, public relations program was part of the mass communication and public relations division housed in the school of journalism, which until then gave only diplomas to its two-year and three-year programs. In 1973, the school was upgraded and renamed Faculty of Communication Arts, equivalent to a department status in the United States.

At present, during the national entrance examinations in the past five years, prospective university students have chosen communication department as their first choice among other social science programs offered at many universities. The most popular and competitive major is advertising, followed by public relations.

The popularity of the communication fields in general and public relations in particular was evidenced in previous research that showed a gradual increase in public relations practitioners

holding communication degree from 16% in 1981 to 33% in 1986 (Satawedin, Apiratanakul, Asawadorndecha & Suthiworasate, 1981; Satawedin, Ekachai, Kansuwan & Lerk-Klang, 1986). The most recent survey of public relations practitioner in Thailand found that the majority of the practitioners surveyed (73%) held college degrees, and one fourth of these degrees were in public relations. Another one-third of degree holders had majored in journalism, mass communication or advertising (Ekachai & Komolsevin, in press).

Currently public relations courses are offered at 21 four-year colleges at the undergraduate levels, eleven of which offer a concentration in public relations.[1] All but one are housed within communication departments.[2]

The first graduate program in communication in the area of development communications was established at Chulalongkorn University in 1978. At present students can take public relations courses at the graduate level at six universities,[3] all are located in Bangkok. In addition, short courses and training workshops are occasionally offered by these academic institutions as well as by the Association of Public Relations Practitioners of Thailand, a professional organization.

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[1] The 11 universities are: Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Bangkok, Ram Kamhaeng, Chiangmai, Thai Chamber of Commerce, Assumption, Durakijbundit, Sri Prathum, Kasembundit, and Naraysuan.

[2] Names of the departments vary at many universities. Most universities, however, prefered "Communication Arts" such as Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok University, Thai Chamber of Commerce University, Assumption University, and Sri Prathum University. Thammasat University chose "Journalism and Mass Communication," while Chiangmai University opted "Mass Communication." At Ram Kamhaeng University, an open university, public relations division is in the department of business administration.

[3] The six universities are: Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Bangkok, Durakijbundit, Siam and Sri Prathum.

In 1984, Thai people had a greater access to public relations education. They were able take public relations courses through distance learning system offered by Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. Such courses as principles of public relations, public relations planning and public relations administration were broadcast via Channel 11, a television station owned and operated by the state's Public Relations Department.

Each year Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Communication Arts admits about 30-35 students in its public relations program and graduates 99% of its fourth-year students. Other state-supported universities admit and produce about the same number of graduates, while at private universities, a larger number of students are enrolled in and graduate from the public relations program each year. According to Teerapone Poorat, dean of School of Communication Arts at Bangkok University, the school annually graduates about 300 students with public relations emphasis. He estimated that each year more than 1,000 students nationwide graduate with specialization in public relations from the closed-system universities (Poorat, November, 1994, personal communications).

Undergraduate Curriculum and Course Content

Like other areas in communication, public relations curricula at Thai universities resemble those in the United States. In deed, the ideology and structure of journalism and mass communication education in the United States have served as a master guideline for the Thai program since the very start. Some institutions invited American professors to help them build, organize and teach their communication program (Siriyuwasak, 1983).

To study the course content of public relation programs, the author examined undergraduate public relations curricula from eight universities (three state-supported and five private universities).[4] Most schools have similar, if not identical, course requirements and the number of hours required.

The number of total credits a student will be required to take to complete a baccalaureate degree varies from 138 at Thammasat University to 150 credits at Chiangmai University. These hours are composed of 35-58 credits in general education courses, 48-54 credits in core courses, 30-36 credits in the public relations emphasis, and 25 minor and elective courses.

In addition to general education courses, a first-year student will typically take an introduction to public relations, introduction to communication, introduction to journalism, introduction to broadcasting, and writing courses in Thai and in English. Second-year studies include courses in persuasion, public relations writing, publicity media production, public relations research. The upperclass students will be required to take public relations planning, public relations for business, government, and non-governmental organizations, seminar in public relations, and an internship. The following 138-credit public relations curriculum at Thammasat University represents the study program that most public relations students will pursue:

1. General education[5] 30 credits

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[4] The schools of which the public relations curriculum were examined are: Thammasat, Chiangmai, Ram Kamhaeng, Bangkok, Thai Chamber of Commerce, Sri Prathum, Kasembundit, and Naraysuan. The first three are state universities.

[5] General education are typically composed of courses in civilization, social psychology, sociology, philosophy, statistics, jurisprudence, economics, Thai, and English.

2. Core courses (12) 36 credits
   --Introduction to Mass Communication
   --Law of Mass Communication
   --Introduction in Journalism
   --Introduction to Broadcasting
   --Introduction to Public Relations
   --Principles of Advertising
   --Art for Communication
   --Studies in Film
   --Communication Theory
   --Communication and Public Opinion
   --Introduction to Communication Research
   --Internship
3. Core courses outside department (6) 18 credits
   --Introduction to Economics
   --General Psychology
   --Logic
   --English for Mass Communication I
   --English for Mass Communication II
   --Introduction to.International Relations or Thai Political Administration or Jurisprudence
4. PR Concentration courses
   A. Mandatory courses (7) 21 credits
   --Writing for Public Relations
   --Photography
   --Public Relations for Government and Business
   --Public Relations Media
   --Public Relations Research
   --Public Relations Planning
   --Public Relations Management
   B. Elective courses (3) 9 credits
   Students may choose from the following:
   --Introduction to Speech Communication
   --Persuasive Communication
   --Public Information System
   --Analysis of Audience Behavior
   --Public Relations Seminar

--Public Relations and New Technology
--International Public Relations
--Marketing

5. Minor courses or electives 24 credits
Students may choose to minor in a field other than communication or take any classes offered at the university as their electives.

Internships

All but one[6] of the eight public relations programs examined include a professional internship, with most being mandatory. Students are required to spend about 135 to 160 hours at government and non-government organizations under supervision of on-site public relations practitioners. The pass/fail evaluation is based on reports and portfolios on students' internship experiences.

Instruction

Thai is the language of instruction at all universities, except Assumption University where all classes are taught in English. Public relations courses offered in the International Program at Bangkok University are also taught in English.

Most courses, particularly introductory level ones, are taught in a lecture format, a traditional mode of instruction. While media production classes offer students an opportunity to involve in hands-on activities, seminar-type classes would have noted guest speakers from different sectors share their public relations experience with the students. A small group discussion promoting critical and analytical brainstorming is not often used,

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6 Ram Kamhaeng University, an open university, does not include an internship in its public relations curriculum.

probably because of a large size of the class at some universities (Poorat, November, 1994, personal communications).

Class handouts are used more often than textbooks which, if used at all, are a translated or rewritten version of American texts (Yuwasirisak, 1983). Several chapters of Cutlip and Center's early editions of Effective Public Relations were translated and used as a major source of public relations instruction. Other texts used as sources include Hendrix's Public Relations Case, Kruckeberg and Starck's Public Relations and Community, and Wilcox and Agee's Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics.

Faculty

Public relations courses at state universities like Chulalongkorn and Thammasat are taught almost exclusively by their full-time faculty. Private institutions, however, employ both full-time and part-time instructors to deliver instruction. These part-timers are either state university professors or public relations professionals at government or private agencies.

In 1980 Adhikarya's study found that 80 percent of communication professors in Thailand held their advanced degrees from American universities. This trend continues. According to a faculty roster in Chulalongkorn University's undergraduate catalog, 36 of the 42 full-time faculty members (86%) in the Faculty of Communication Arts hold a master's or a doctorate from U.S. universities. All seven public relations instructors received their graduate degrees from the United States. The ratio of U.S.-trained communication educators were lower at Thammasat University, where 16 of its 25 full-time faculty earned their advanced degrees overseas, 10 of them from the United States.

Graduate programs

At present, six universities offer a master's degree in communication where advanced public relations courses are available for students to take. At Chulalongkorn, to complete a master's degree in development communications, a student must earn at least 49 course credits. These consist of 22 credits of required courses, 15 credits of elective courses and 12 credits of thesis (see Table 1 for a list of course requirements.

Thammasat University also offers courses in development communications in its M.A. program in mass communication. While Sri Prathum and Siam universities did not position their graduate program in a specific area in communication, Durakijbundit University emphasized business communication where courses in advertising and public relations are integrated.

Bangkok University's master of arts in communication arts program offers students an opportunity to concentrate in public relations, advertising, mass communication, and development communications (see Table 2 for Bangkok University's program). Students must complete 48 credit hours to complete the requirements. In addition to 33 required courses, students can write a nine-credit thesis and take two elective courses or take 15 hours of elective courses plus the comprehensive written and oral examinations.

Discussion and Conclusion

Public relations education in Thailand has come a long way since its inception 30 years ago. It has developed and grown rapidly especially in the past 10 years. This may be due to an

increasing demand of trained practitioners from both government and business sectors.

Much work remains to be done, however, for this fast-growing field. For example, Thai public relations curricula are very similar to American ones. And since most faculty members were educated in the United States, they generally transfer their knowledge, importing western ideas to the Thai classrooms. This, of course, may pose a problem if the faculty does not know how to apply western theories, principles, and case studies in the Thai contexts.

Furthermore, as public relations continue to expand, there is an urgent need for public relations texts or teaching materials that adapt western ideas into the Thai cultural environment. The texts should also include Thai examples and case studies to which students can relate. In addition, Thai faculty do little research and some have limited professional experience. Most rely on western-published books for theoretical information or practical applications. The lack of an instructor's professional and scholarly experiences may indeed hamper the quality of the public relations instruction.

The future of Thailand's public relations education, however, seems bright. Compared to other Asian countries, like China or Japan, public relations education in Thailand is impressive and continues to play an indispensible role in the production of quality practitioners and the development of the occupation.

Table 1

Course Requirements of M.A. Program in Development Communications
Chulalongkorn University

Required Courses (22 credits)

Fundamental of Social Communication (3)
Communication of Innovation (3)
Applied Statistics for Communication Research (3)
Media for development I (2)
Media for Development II (2)
Communication Research Methods
Planning and Evaluation of Communication Projects (3)
Seminar in Development Communication (3)

Elective Courses (15 credits)

Public Enterprise Law and Procedure (3)
Social Organization (3)
Social and Cultural Change (3)
Sociology of Development (3)
Public Relations for Development Work (2)
Production Techniques for Development I (3)
Production Techniques for Development II (3)
Communication for Non-Formal Education (3)
Communication for Persuasion (3)
Audience Analysis (3)
Design and Analysis of Survey Research (3)
Economic Development Theory (3)
Ethics and Responsibility in Mass Communication (2)
The Role of Computerized Database System
for Development in Thai Society (3)
Organizational Communication (2)
Seminar in Organizational Communication (3)
Seminar in Problems of Rural Development (3)
Individual Study (2)

Thesis (12 credits)

Table 2
Course Requirements the Master of Arts in Communication Arts
Bangkok University

Course Requirements (33 credits)

Theories in Communication
Interpersonal Communication
Theories in Mass Communication
Communication and Public Opinion
Organizational Communication and Management
Communication Research Methods
Message Design
Media Production I
Media Production II
Communication Planning and Evaluation
Seminar in Communication

Elective Courses (6 credits for thesis option, 15 for non-thesis)

Public Relations Concentration
Advanced Public Relations
Public Relations Management
Public Relations Policy and Planning
Public Relations Research and Evaluation
Public Relations Innovation and Technology

Advertising Concentration
Marketing management
Advertising Psychology
Advertising and Consumer Analysis
Advertising Planning
Advertising Management

Mass Communication Concentration
Advanced News Reporting
Comparative Mass Communication Systems
Laws and Ethics of Mass Media
Mass Media and Politics
Mass Media Management

Development Communication Concentration
Fundamentals of Social Communication
Social and Culture Change
Media for Development
Development Communication Research
Information Systems

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